

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1342

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINS SY JO
TAGS: SYRIAN REACTION TO ALLEGATIONS LINKING KING HUSSEIN TO CIA

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE REFRAINED FROM PUBLISHING ANY NEWS OR COMMENTARY ON WASHINGTON POST ALLEGATIONS THAT KING HUSSEIN RECEIVED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM CIA. MANY SYRIANS UNDOUBTEDLY UNIMPRESSED BY REPORT, BUT SOME BELIEVE IT WILL HAVE IMPACT ON SYRIAN MILITARY AND ON ASAD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BAATH PARTY. OTHERS WONDER WHETHER IT SIGNAL U.S. WILLING TO SEE HUSSEIN REPLACED BY PALESTINIANS. END SUMMARY.

2. SYRIAN MEDIA THROUGH FEB 25 HAVE REFRAINED FROM DISSEMINATING NEWS OF ALLEGATIONS THAT KING HUSSEIN RECEIVED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM CIA. THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THIS REFLECTS CONSCIOUS POLICY OF IGNORING THIS EMBARRASSING DEVELOPMENT. REMARKS MADE BY PRES ASAD TO AMERICAN PRESS CORPS DURING SECRETARY'S VISIT REGARDING ISSUE WERE NOT REPORTED BY LOCAL MEDIA. ASAD TOLD REPORTERS THAT HE DOUBTED ACCURACY OF HUSSEIN-USG RELATIONSHIP AS DESCRIBED BY AMERICAN PAPERS AND NOTED GOJ DENIAL AND LACK OF CONFIRMATION
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OF IT BY OFFICIAL USG SOURCE (DAMASCUS 1211).

3. SOME SYRIANS WE HAVE TALKED WITH EXPRESSED MILD IRRITATION AT REPORT. BUT OTHERS ARTICULATED THEIR CONCERN THAT ISSUE HAS EMBARRASSED ASAD WITH SYRIAN MILITARY AND BAATH PARTY. ACCORDING TO LOCAL COLUMNIST, ASAD HAS BEEN UNDER PRESSURE FROM SOME IN PARTY WHO HAVE RESISTED HIS RAPPROCHEMENT WITH HASHEMITES

SINCE HE INITIATED RATHER DARING POLICY DEPARTURE--FOR A SYRIA WHICH STILL PROFESSES THAT ITS LEFTIST PRINCIPLES REMAIN INTACT WITHIN CONTEXT OF ASAD'S CORRECTIVE MOVEMENT. THESE RECALCITRANTS NOW HAVE NEW WEAPON TO UTILIZE AGAINST ASAD. SOURCE SAID THEY WILL PUT ASAD ON NOTICE THAT HIS FUTURE TIES WITH HUSSEIN WILL BE JUDGED IN LIGHT OF REVELATION THAT HUSSEIN CONNECTED TO CIA.

4. ASAD MAY ALSO FIND SOME GRUMBLING FROM WITHIN HIS OWN MILITARY. AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT TOLD US THAT HE HAD RIDDEN RECENTLY INTO DAMASCUS FROM LEBANON WITH SYRIAN ARMY CAPTAIN. HE INFORMED OFFICER ABOUT WASHINGTON POST ACCUSATION. OFFICER REPLIED THAT THIS MEANT SYRIA'S MILITARY SECRETS COULD NO LONGER BE PRESERVED, BECAUSE HUSSEIN WOULD PASS THEM TO ISRAEL VIA US. COLUMNIST DESCRIBED ANSWER AS "GUT RESPONSE" OF LOW RANKING OFFICER, BUT SAID HE SUSPECTED OTHER OFFICERS WOULD SHARE THIS VIEW.

5. SYRIAN SOURCE IN TOUCH WITH DISSIDENT CIRCLES IN DAMASCUS REPORTED THAT LOCAL POLITICAL COMMUNITY BUZZING WITH SPECULATION THAT REPORT CONSTITUTED SIGNAL FROM US THAT HUSSEIN WOULD BE PERMITTED TO FALL IN ORDER TO ARRANGE HIS REPLACEMENT BY PALESTINIAN GOVT, THUS SOLVING PALESTINIAN DILEMMA THAT HINDERS FURTHER PROGRESS TOWARD SETTLEMENT. SOURCE ASSERTED THOSE HE HAS TALKED WITH SPENDING LITTLE TIME ANALYZING WHETHER REPORT TRUE; THEY ASSUME IT IS. INSTEAD, THEY PONDERING WHAT IT MIGHT LEAD TO IN REGION AND WHAT IT ILLUSTRATES ABOUT ATTITUDES OF NEW ADMINISTRATION.

6. COMMENT: IT IS STILL TOO SOON TO PREDICT WHETHER WASHINGTON POST REPORT WILL CAUSE ANY PERMANENT DAMAGE TO SYRO-JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIPS. CONFIDENTIAL

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TIONS AFTER PERIOD OF INITIAL EMBARRASSMENT PASSES. PROBLEMS FROM BAATHISTS WHO HAVE NOT RECONCILED THEMSELVES TO SYRO-JORDANIAN RAPPROCHEMENT ARE PROBABLY CONTAINABLE, ALTHOUGH THEIR SENSE OF VINDICATION WILL PROBABLY LEAVE THEM LESS RETICENT ABOUT CRITICIZING NEW ENDEAVORS WITH JORDAN. GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR DAMAGE PROBABLY LIES AMONG MILITARY OFFICERS WHO HAVE FOCUSED MORE ON SECURITY ASPECT OF REVELATION AND WERE NOT DEEPLY CONCERNED PREVIOUSLY ABOUT HUSSEIN'S IDEOLOGICAL DEFICIENCIES. NEGATIVE IMPACT WILL THUS AFFECT TO UNDETERMINED EXTEND ASAD'S RELATIONS WITH BAATH PARTY AND HIS MILITARY AND THIS COULD INJECT ADDED ELEMENT OF COMPLEXITY INTO HIS TIES WITH JORDANIAN MONARCH. MURPHY

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